



HOMES UNDER THE HAMMER

TENANTS SPEAK OUT FROM LONDON'S WORST FLATS >>PAGES 10&11



RUSSIAN PROTESTS
A GROWING WAVE OF ANGER AT PUTIN AND POVERTY >>PAGE 8

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TORY BRITAIN REFUGEES TRAPPED IN SQUALOR

CLOSE THE CAMPS



NAPIER BARRACKS in Folkestone, Kent, following a fire at the site last week. It's unfit for human habitation

PICTURE: PA

REFUGEES FORCED into squalid camps, fighting back by whatever means they can. This isn't some foreign news story, it's Britain today.

Overcrowding, shortages and lack of safe drinking water and food are a daily reality.

Refugees in Napier Barracks in Kent last week protested against being stuck in the camp during the pandemic. Coronavirus was

allowed to spread and many are left without medical care.

Refugees are also being held in ex-army barracks such as in Penally, Pembrokeshire, and RAF Coltishall in Norfolk.

And the detention centre at Yarl's Wood, Bedford may be extended to hold asylum seekers.

There is big money in forcing refugees behind barbed wire. Camp management firm

Clearsprings has made a profit of over £5.8 million in five years—despite the atrocious conditions in their barracks.

Those fleeing to Britain should be treated with care rather than being made to feel like criminals.

The borders should be torn down to let people in. And asylum seeker camps must be shut for good.

Barracks where migrants don't even have safe running water

>>PAGE 4

COVID-19

Racism to blame for vaccine fears

BLACK PEOPLE are some of the least likely to say they will get vaccinated from coronavirus.

There are reasons why so many do not trust health authorities and their drugs.

Throughout history black people have been subjected to horrendous racist experiments in the name of science.

>>Pages 14&15

ENVIRONMENT



Activists fight eviction of HS2 protest site

CLIMATE campaigners are protesting against attempts to evict them from an anti-HS2 protest site.

Demonstrators occupied a tunnel underneath Euston in central London to stop the high-speed railway's construction. Others climbed trees to stop them from being destroyed.

>>Page 6

ECONOMY

GameStop battle leads to profiteering

WAR WAS declared on Wall Street when Reddit users bought stocks in failing company GameStop and pushed its prices up.

Hedge funds lost out big time and were forced to buy back expensive shares. But battle on the stock exchange offers nothing to working class people.

>>Page 7



THE THINGS THEY SAY

'I share the government's ambition to make it a national mission to reopen our schools'

Keir Starmer, the Labour leader is apparently the leader of the opposition

'I don't think the opportunities of Brexit are about whittling away workers' rights or trying to have a race to the bottom or trying to reduce wages'

Tory Kwasi Kwarteng says he halted a post-Brexit attack on workers' rights when he became Business Secretary

'The British are amongst the worst idlers in the world... employment law discourages small business from taking a risk...The UK should do whatever we can to cut the burden of employment regulation'

Kwasi Kwarteng in the book *Britannia Unchained*



Chagos Islanders denied money from support fund

LESS THAN £12,000 of a £40 million fund set up to compensate Chagos islanders who were forcibly evicted from their home by the British government has reached those living here.

In four years the foreign office fund has distributed less than 1 percent of its budget in direct support.

Thousands of Chagossians were forcibly removed from their home on the Indian Ocean island by the British government in the 1960s.

The government has since admitted their treatment was wrong and a matter of "deep regret". But it still allows the largest island, Diego Garcia, to be used as a strategic US military airbase.

Last week, the United Nations maritime court ruled that Britain had no sovereignty over the Chagos Islands.

The Foreign Office funding used so far has been spent on interpretation services for islanders many of whom depend on French creole translation, and modest support for community groups.

Money was also spent on scoping visits

Andrew Cumpsty, former leader of the Tories on Reading council has joined the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA). Ex-ministers and civil servants must get permission from the "revolving door" watchdog if they want to take on paid work in the two years after leaving office. Cumpsty is also chairman and founder of the Enterprise Forum, which acts as a link between the bosses and the Tories.

to the islands by government officials, with several hundred thousand pounds used for "heritage trips".

Louis Amadis, whose mother was born in Diego Garcia, moved to Britain in 2004. Until the pandemic hit he was working at the check-in desks in Gatwick airport. When the first round of furlough came to a close, he was made redundant and he had to give up his flat.

Talking about the unspent support fund, Amadis said, "It's really painful to

Andrew Cumpsty

be honest, knowing that we're supposed to have this support, but we don't have any of it, haven't seen any of it."

Charities have been handing out crisis grants of £50 to families who are struggling to buy food or pay for funeral costs. But they are expressed frustrated that the multimillion pound support fund is not being used.

The vice-chair of the UK Chagos Support Association, Stefan Donnelly, said, "It seems ridiculous that we're giving out such meagre amounts, raised from small individual donations, when such a large fund committed to helping Chagossians is going unused."

In 2017, the foreign office signed a memorandum of understanding with Crawley borough council over work to assess where these funds would be best allocated.

But the council abandoned the needs assessment the following year and returned almost £40,000, citing strains the research was putting on the council's relationship with the Chagos Islanders.

A FOUR-YEAR-OLD boy was referred to the government's anti-extremism Prevent strategy after talking about the Fortnite video game at his after-school club. Some 624 under-sixes were referred to Prevent between 2016 and 2019. During the same period, 1,405 children between the ages of six and nine were also referred to the scheme.

Bonus means benefit cut for NHS workers

BRUTAL regulations have led to some Scottish NHS workers deferring or refusing a £500 bonus in case it impacts on their benefits.

The bonus was promised to 391,000 NHS and social care staff in Scotland as a "thank you" for the work they have carried out during the Covid-19 crisis.

Managers have written to employees offering them the chance to opt out of the payment after it emerged it could impact on other benefits.

Low-paid health service workers receive government top-ups to wages from schemes including universal credit.

The Department for Work and Pensions confirmed the

Department to blame?

bonus—due to be paid this month—would be considered earnings, resulting in some payments being cut.

The refusal to make sure health and care workers receive the full cash is the fault of the Tories and the Scottish government.

This follows a scandal last year in Wales where a bonus for care workers was only a quarter of what it was promised.

Irish scandal survivor testimony destroyed

THE destruction of audio recordings of the personal interviews given by survivors of mother and baby homes has added insult to the injury of the ongoing scandal in Ireland.

Survivors believe their stories, which they say are not reflected in the recently published report, will never be properly told as recordings of the accounts they gave to the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Investigation have been destroyed.

The Commission's final report was published last month. Many survivors have criticised the

Site of a mass grave in Ireland

report, in particular conclusions which state there was a lack of evidence of forced adoption and abuse, despite testimonies contradicting this.

There were no transcripts made of the evidence in the testimonies.

Benefits errors caused death

A WOMAN killed herself after a series of errors were made with her benefits claim, an inquest has found.

Philippa Day took an overdose in August 2019, and died from a brain injury weeks later in hospital.

An inquest into her death heard the 27 year old, from Nottinghamshire, was found unconscious next to a letter

Philippa Day
from the Department for Work and Pensions. It had been sent by Capita, the benefits assessment firm.

Assistant Coroner for Nottinghamshire, Gordon Clow, identified 30 "problems" with the way Capita and the DWP handled Philippa's claims.

Philippa experienced agoraphobia.

On the day of her benefits assessment, she felt she "couldn't cope" with leaving the house.

Clow said a "distressing and factually inaccurate letter was sent to Philippa" before her death, advising her that if she failed to attend the appointment "without good reason", her claim would "likely" be refused. "It is significant she had the letter by her side at the time she took her overdose," he said.

Her family said her weekly payments had been reduced to £60.

Solicitors for her family highlighted a phone call during which Philippa described the distress she was under to a DWP agent.

Reaching his conclusion, the coroner said, "The administration of Philippa Day's benefits claim was characterised by multiple errors. As a result of errors made, Philippa Day's income from benefits more than halved for a period of several months, causing her severe financial hardship.

"A decision was made in June 2019 to require her to attend an assessment at a centre.

"The distress caused by the administration of her welfare benefits claim left her suffering acute distress and exacerbated many of her other chronic stresses.

"Were it not for these problems it is unlikely Philippa Day would've taken an overdose."

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Newsdesk
020 7840 5656
Circulation
020 7840 5601



Write to
Socialist Worker
PO Box 74955
London
E16 9EJ

The fight continues for abortion rights in Poland

by AGNIESZKA KALETA

THE FIGHT for basic abortion rights is on the streets of Poland again.

A shameful and cruel ruling of a rigged constitutional tribunal was published last Wednesday.

It introduces a near-total ban on abortion meaning that, even if the foetus is severely damaged and has no chances of survival, women will still have to give birth.

The repressive nature of the ban means a strong chilling effect on doctors and anyone wishing to help women access an abortion.

A few days before the ruling was published, a man who gave his partner money for abortion pills was sentenced to six months in prison.

The situation in Poland around women's reproductive rights has been unbearable since the mid-1990s. The state and the Catholic Church worked hand-in-hand to make Polish women second-class citizens.

Poland already has some of the most draconian anti-abortion laws in the world.

Around 150,000-200,000 women a year are forced to go abroad or have illegal, expensive abortions.

But this draconian new law amounts to the torture of pregnant women and is a reminder for us all that our rights are never set in stone.

Protests have again exploded onto the streets of town and cities throughout Poland. Once again we are at the forefront of the battle for safe and legal abortion.

The demonstration on Friday recalled the first days in October with many thousands on the streets of the capital. It was the 100th day since the protests began.

"My body, my choice," "The revolution has a uterus," and, "You have blood on your hands," read some of the placards at the protests.



ABORTION PROTESTS continue in Poland



Agnieszka Kaleta

The movement over the last three months is bigger than in 2016 and 2018. On those occasions, government attempts at harsher abortion bans were defeated.

We have seen the biggest protest movement since demonstrations were legalised 30 years ago.

But the ultra-conservative Law and Justice government is continuing with its attacks.

There are also anti-fascist slogans on the protests and anti-capitalism is popular with many of the young people.

At the same time, it would help a lot if the best-known leaders of the movement pushed the unions to mobilise and perhaps call for

workplace action.

We really hope this is a turning point in our struggle—and that our harsh abortion laws will soon belong to the past.

The success of movements in Ireland and recently Argentina sent a message of hope to all women threatened by strict abortion laws. And especially to those of our sisters who are most socially and economically disadvantaged.

The movement is not weakening and we are determined it will continue until free abortion on demand is won.

Agnieszka Kaleta is a member of Pracownicza Demokracja (Workers Democracy), the sister organisation of the SWP in Poland.

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Labour pushes for a return to schools

BORIS JOHNSON has said that schools in England could fully reopen from 8 March. But Johnson said this would depend "on lots of things going right".

He made the comments last week, as virus cases and deaths continued to remain high.

But disgracefully, Labour leader Keir Starmer and shadow education secretary Kate Green called for a more concrete plan.

Labour has repeatedly called for schools to fully reopen as soon as possible.

The party claims it is concerned about the impact of lockdown measures on children.

But the danger is that constant demands for

Back to school?

SCHOOLS to reopen puts pressure on children and workers to return to unsafe environments.

Schools are still seeing virus outbreaks despite only being open to vulnerable children and those with key worker parents.

Public Health England last week reported 22 confirmed outbreaks in primary schools in "week 3".

There were 37 confirmed outbreaks in nursery schools, which are open as usual, compared to 34 the previous week. Another 37 outbreaks were confirmed in special schools.

The government is considering prioritising school workers for Covid-19 vaccinations, a measure Starmer has also called for.

But vaccinating workers won't stop the virus from spreading among children and students—or prevent them from bringing it home.

Workers are right to resist any return to unsafe schools.

Wales risks school infection rise

SOME PRIMARY school children could return to schools in Wales after the February half term.

Welsh first minister Mark Drakeford said last week that the Labour-led Welsh government plans a "phased and flexible" return from 22 February.

Drakeford said that the youngest children could return first as they are the least likely to catch and spread coronavirus. But all the evidence shows that young children are highly effective at spreading the virus.

Primary aged children were the second most infected of all age groups by the end of school term in December.

And the NEU union calculated that primary and secondary school teachers are 1.9 times more likely to contract the virus than the general population.

Drakeford himself admitted last week that "when people get together, coronavirus thrives".

Tories lock refugees in a 'breeding ground' for coronavirus

by ISABEL RINGROSE

ASYLUM SEEKERS held at an ex-army camp in Kent have protested against the appalling conditions they've been kept in during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are still over 100 men living in Napier Barracks in Folkestone after a fire occurred after a protest on Friday. They have been left with no heating or electricity, while food and safe drinking water are not readily available.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said she will pursue legal action against the protesters and that their actions were "deeply offensive to the taxpayers of this country".

It's the treatment of refugees that's offensive. Refugees have now been detained in the camps following the fire.

It has been revealed that the Home Office had been using the camps to house asylum seekers following fears that better accommodation would "undermine confidence" in the asylum system.

Hostile

This racist rhetoric is an excuse to ramp up the hostile environment against those most in need.

Pete, an activist with Kent Refugee Help, told Socialist Worker that local groups have tried to explain the risks of coronavirus to those in charge.

"In the midst of a pandemic the government has acted completely recklessly," said Pete.

"It's a critical situation. There's already an existing problem that people are effectively in detention centres when they shouldn't be."

Detention centres and prisons have been an absolute breeding ground for the virus.

"The government is establishing new petri dishes of potential virus transmission by putting people in these camps."

"We've been raising this at every opportunity we've had in meeting with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration for the last six weeks. Nothing was done because Priti Patel—deeply offensive

there were no mass infections."

But then the cases "exploded" two weeks ago.

"People in the barracks who had not tested positive are still in there," Pete explained.

"There are empty hotels, and there is no logical reason why these can't be used, especially with how appalling the sites are."

"People talk about the army barracks being 'good enough for our boys'. But they are very old buildings. And these people haven't signed up to be trained."

Sheets

"In the communal areas people are hanging sheets to separate themselves. This isn't a civilised way of treating people who are going through an asylum process."

"It's not even within pandemic safeguarding protocols. It's outrageous."

Pete described the barracks as similar to detention camps, with refugees unwell with Covid-19 having no access to medical support.

He added, "It's natural that people protested."

"They haven't been kept informed of what's going on. Since the fire, they've been placed in bubbles that comprise a whole block."

This is what England's largest ever study of health inequalities has concluded.

People from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups are often poorer and more likely to suffer from underlying health conditions, the study has found.

They are also more likely to experience bad treatment at a GP surgery and inadequate support from local services for housing and social care.

Institutional racism is at the heart of this inequality.

The pandemic has had a greater impact for black people—from being up to four times more likely to die from Covid-19 to being hardest hit by job cuts.

Almost all BAME groups surveyed suffer worse health-related quality of life than white British people.

The average health of 60 year olds that are Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Arab, or Traveller



REFUGEES HAVE been kept in appalling conditions in Kent's Napier Barracks

PICTURE: PA

Deprivation causes health gap of twenty years for black people

BLACK PEOPLE in England suffer health inequalities that equate to being 20 years older than their actual age.

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The average health of 60 year olds that are Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Arab, or Traveller

would be expected in a white British 80-year-old.

Mashkura Begum, a charity worker in the West Midlands, said systemic inequality is at play.

She said, "Very few ethnic minorities are involved in the design, discussion or delivery of the services they are service users of."

"Language barrier is used as a common factor, however in reality there is a cultural inertia by the health leaders to make the necessary changes."

And Dr Arif Dasu, a GP in Preston, agreed that funding, engagement and insight from the government is partly to blame.

"Previous and older generations suffered with having to overcome racial, communal, social and language barriers," he said.

"I have seen and heard some patients report feeling that they are less likely to be taken seriously than a Caucasian or white British person. This has led to a lack of trust in the services

and government."

The new survey analysed responses from 1.4 million aged over 55 people registered at GP practices across England from 2014 to 2017.

And it included more than 150,000 people from non-white British groups—the largest sample ever recorded.

Researchers found that social deprivation was more common among these groups but couldn't explain the cause of the findings.

The explanation is simple—a system set up against black and working class people.



The group celebrate

Victory as terror charges dropped for Stansted 15

ANTI-RACISTS are celebrating after the Stansted 15 protesters won an appeal to overturn their convictions under terror laws on Friday.

The group stopped a deportation flight in March 2017 by locking themselves to a Boeing 767. The Home Office chartered the aircraft to deport 60 migrants to Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana.

Melanie Strickland, one of the Stansted 15, told Socialist Worker, "It feels great to win. It's been nearly four years since the action, I thought it would never end."

"There was a lot of stress, having a terror charge over our heads. It brought job insecurity, trouble travelling, renting cars and so on."

"We were peaceful and stopped terrorism."

Home secretary Priti Patel announced at the beginning of this month that the Tories would make it easier to deport people who have served time for minor offences.

It's right to resist Britain's racist immigration system. Some of the migrants due to be deported on the disrupted flight are still in Britain.

One of the protesters, May Mackeith, said in a statement, "The nightmare of this bogus charge, a ten-week trial and the threat of prison has dominated our lives for four years. Despite the draconian response, we know our actions were justified."

They had been convicted under the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990—the first time the terror law was used against political protest.

"Home secretary Priti Patel announced at the beginning of this month that the Tories would make it easier to deport people who have served time for minor offences."

"Mothers, fathers, colleagues, friends and family members are rebuilding lives the government attempted to destroy."

And we still don't know how much protection vaccines will give and how much they will cut virus transmission.

BOOK YOUR holiday and look forward to a "great British summer". That's the message from Tory health secretary Matt Hancock as the race to ease coronavirus restrictions intensifies.

The Tories are quickly shedding their caution about ending lockdown measures. Last week Boris Johnson said schools in England could fully reopen on 8 March, but that this wasn't guaranteed.

Now he's pushing for it. The Telegraph reported this week that Johnson has "ordered ministers to ramp up preparations for reopening schools".

The Tories pin their hopes for a "return to normal" on their vaccination programme. They say they will have offered jabs to everyone over 70 by 15 February.

But "offering" vaccines isn't the same as having one. By Monday of this week, around half the staff at Britain's biggest care home provider, HC-One, had not received a vaccine.

And we still don't know how much protection vaccines will give and how much they will cut virus transmission.

Socialist Worker WHAT WE THINK

VACCINES DON'T MEAN IT'S THE END OF THE VIRUS

Covid-19 has allowed more time for new strains to emerge.

One, the so-called "South African variant", is more transmissible and has been found in eight areas of Britain.

Johnson claimed vaccines will tackle it. Yet Public Health England said it shows a "diminished" response to vaccines.

The Telegraph hailed a drop in cases and deaths on Monday of this week. There were still 18,607 new cases—and 406 deaths, just days earlier, on Wednesday, some 1,725 deaths were recorded.

The Tories want to ease restrictions because that helps profits. Unfortunately they are being aided by Labour leader Keir Starmer, who is desperate to "work with" the Tories to get schools reopened quickly.

Of course, many working class people want an end to restrictions. Lack of support has made lockdowns harder than they needed to be.

But being pushed into unsafe situations isn't in our interests.

We can't trust the Tories when they tell us that they are getting the virus under control. Ordinary people have to be prepared to resist them.

The Tories want to ease restrictions because that helps profits

population, which Aung San Suu Kyi tried to cover up.

One fact Johnson won't mention is this repressive regime where it suits them. US president Joe Biden has threatened sanctions against Myanmar after the military overthrew prime minister Aung San Suu Kyi. He said it was a "direct assault on the country's transition to democracy".

Boris Johnson joined in. Neither were quite so vocal about the ethnic cleansing of Myanmar's minority Rohingya Muslim.

But they don't like to talk about democracy in places such

as Saudi Arabia—a Western-allied dictatorship—or Israel, where Palestinians live under apartheid.

And it's not a concern for them when they use lockdown and anti-union laws to clamp down on protests in their own countries either.

So it's right to be suspicious of calls to back right wing Russian politician Alexei Navalny under the guise of "democracy".

It's better to back protesters by fighting for democracy from our own rulers.



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ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS

Vaccine nationalism will endanger us all

FARCICAL ASPECTS aside, the row over the European Union's vaccine supplies reveals the inability of the present system to manage the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is a farce, however. Because the European Commission (EC) was slow and inefficient in ordering vaccines it is threatening to impose a new version of Napoleon's Continental System by banning vaccine exports outside the European Single Market. Initially the EC was planning to include Northern Ireland in the ban. This would override the famous October 2019 protocol between Britain and the EU that kept Northern Ireland in the Single Market after Brexit.

It is the same protocol which Boris Johnson was roundly denounced by the EU for threatening to take powers to override certain of its provisions. The EC has vindicated those of us who said that Brussels' stridently proclaimed commitment to keeping the border open between the two parts of Ireland was just a cynical manoeuvre to keep London on the back foot.

It's also farcical that the EC is demanding that AstraZeneca prioritises its contract to supply its vaccine to the EU over its earlier contract with Britain. At the same time the French and German governments are claiming that this vaccine isn't effective for the most vulnerable age group, the over-65s.

The ugly reality behind the EU's approach to Brexit is emerging. As the Financial Times's very anti-Brexit columnist Gideon Rachman tweeted, "The mistake over Northern Ireland may have been corrected—but it was still very revealing. Basically, as far as the Commission is concerned, this is all about Britain. Things could get nasty."

Given that Britain is proving more efficient at procuring and distributing vaccines, the EU is even managing to make Johnson look reasonable. This is quite an achievement in the week that it was officially confirmed that his mishandling of the pandemic had cost 100,000 lives.

The conflict is an expression of what the political economist Will Davies calls "vaccine mercantilism". The leading capitalist states—or in the EU's case a cartel of these states—are overriding the market in order to ensure their own populations get access to the vaccines. In the process, all their proclaimed commitment to the free market goes to the wind.

Pandemic

The Financial Times Trade Secrets column pointed out that this isn't the first time this has happened with the EU. At the start of the pandemic, it "imposed bloc-wide restrictions on PPE exports to keep essential goods at home. Weaknesses in the EU's internal market spill over into dysfunction in external trade ... because of the EU's inability to manage internal supply and demand in a crisis."

Vaccine mercantilism means an alliance between states and Big Pharma. To quote Trade Secrets again, "rich-world governments have approached the development of a coronavirus vaccine with a public-private model. The idea is to guarantee demand via public purchase commitments ... and get pharma companies to do research and development in return for intellectual property rights. Oxford university was initially going to give the IP for its vaccine away but was persuaded, not least by the highly influential Gates Foundation, to partner with a pharma company instead."

The real victims in all this are not the peoples of warring Europe. Even the EU should manage to roll out the vaccines this year. It is the majority of the world's population in the Global South. Their governments are too poor to make deals with Big Pharma and so are dependent on Northern handouts via Covax, an under-funded programme of the World Health Organisation.

The governments of the rich countries used their wealth and power to grab far more doses than they need. According to the New York Times, the EU will have enough to inoculate its residents twice over, Britain and the United States four times over, and Canada six times. And 51 percent of vaccine doses have been reserved by states representing less than 15 percent of the world's population.

This huge injustice endangers us all. The longer the pandemic continues worldwide the more opportunities there are for new and more dangerous variants of the virus to be selected and spread. Vaccine mercantilism will exact a high price.



PROTESTING OUTSIDE London's Euston station against the high speed railway

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

Activists battle eviction of anti-HS2 protest camp

by SARAH BATES

ANTI-HS2 activists occupying a 100-foot tunnel underneath a park in Euston say that eviction teams are putting their lives in danger.

Protesters occupied the tunnels in a last-ditch effort to stop the area from being destroyed and turned into a temporary taxi rank and then sold to developers of high speed railway HS2.

One protester told the BBC over the weekend that "all night we've had rocks falling down on to our head through the gaps".

"They've kept us awake all night for hours and hours and hours to try and coax us out of the hole," they said.

Five other activists were arrested last Thursday and Friday, some for allegedly breaking lockdown restrictions and two under the anti-union laws.

Bailiffs also tried to take down the structure, built by activists, above the tunnels.

Blue Sandford escaped to the tunnel when HS2 forces moved in to evict the camp last Wednesday.

"I'm in this tunnel because they are irresponsibly putting my life at risk from

the climate and ecological emergency," they explained.

"They are behaving in a way that is so reckless and unsafe that I don't feel like they are giving us any option but to protest in this way to help save our own lives and the lives of all the people round the world."

Activists spent months secretly digging the tunnel, which they nicknamed "Kelvin", to prepare to occupy the space when HS2 Ltd began the eviction.

Protester Larch Maxey said from inside the tunnel, "This eviction is due to go on for some time.

"This is our big chance,

with this eviction, to really turn things around, to stop HS2's ridiculous, horrific scheme."

He called on people to build pressure against the high speed railway.

Footage

Protesters say they gave the BBC access to their tunnel on the promise that the broadcaster wouldn't release the footage until the eviction had begun.

But, said Larch, it reneged on its promise and just hours later the cops moved in.

One protester said from the trees, "We're in the midst of an illegal eviction.

"People are being dragged out violently.

"These guys have nothing better to do than turn up at five in the morning and evict a bunch of principled people trying to defend nature," he said.

"It looked really violent from what we could see at the fortress, they've smashed their way in."

The arrest and harassment of HS2 activists last week shows that our right to protest is severely under threat.

Got a story?
Email ideas to reports@socialistworker.co.uk

Construction threatens nature

EUSTON IS due to be a key station on the new high-speed railway, which began construction in earnest in September last year.

Construction for the new railway is set to fell 108 ancient woodlands and destroy large swathes of areas of special scientific interest. It threatens animal

and plant species, as well as being hugely destructive for the rural communities that live around the Chilterns and Midlands route.

The Oaktree Review, a report commissioned by the government, said in 2019 that HS2 could cost as much as £106 billion. But the final bill

could be even higher. It's a huge price to pay for a project that promises to shave just a short time off the journey time between Birmingham and London. HS2 activists are right to draw attention to this damaging project—and the system of climate-wrecking policies that it represents.

GameStop—war on Wall Street or more capitalist profiteering?

Fat cats lost out after Reddit users bought up shares in a failing firm, but gambling on the stock market offers nothing to ordinary people, say **Isabel Ringrose** and **Simon Baskettter**

REDDIT USERS declared war on Wall Street last week. The “David-and-Goliath” battle saw small investors use Wall Street’s own tactics against it by buying stocks in the failing company GameStop.

It pushed GameStop prices up by more than 1,700 percent.

The firm, a US video game retailer, saw its stock value plummet from £40 a share in 2013 to £3.65 in 2019. It was set to close 450 shops this year.

Hedge funds had placed bets on the expectation that GameStop’s share price would dive.

These funds take shares “on loan” for a given period of time. They sell immediately in the hope that they can buy them back cheaper at a later date and pocket the difference—short selling.

But small investors began to buy up shares, and GameStop’s stock value surged. Some hedge funds had to buy back their borrowed shares at high prices, which pushed prices higher.

Within two hours last Monday, GameStop’s stock prices rose by 145 percent—halting trading on the New York Stock Exchange nine times.

On Wednesday GameStop’s shares rose by another 135 percent and £17 billion worth of shares were exchanged.

Melvin Capital Management, a hedge fund, lost 30 percent of its £9.12 billion, and is now being bailed out by other companies.

Fat cats have lost out big time. But that doesn’t make the small investors the heroes.

The Reddit user who began the investment into GameStop placed an initial outlay of almost £40,000. Most ordinary people don’t have such funds to spare.

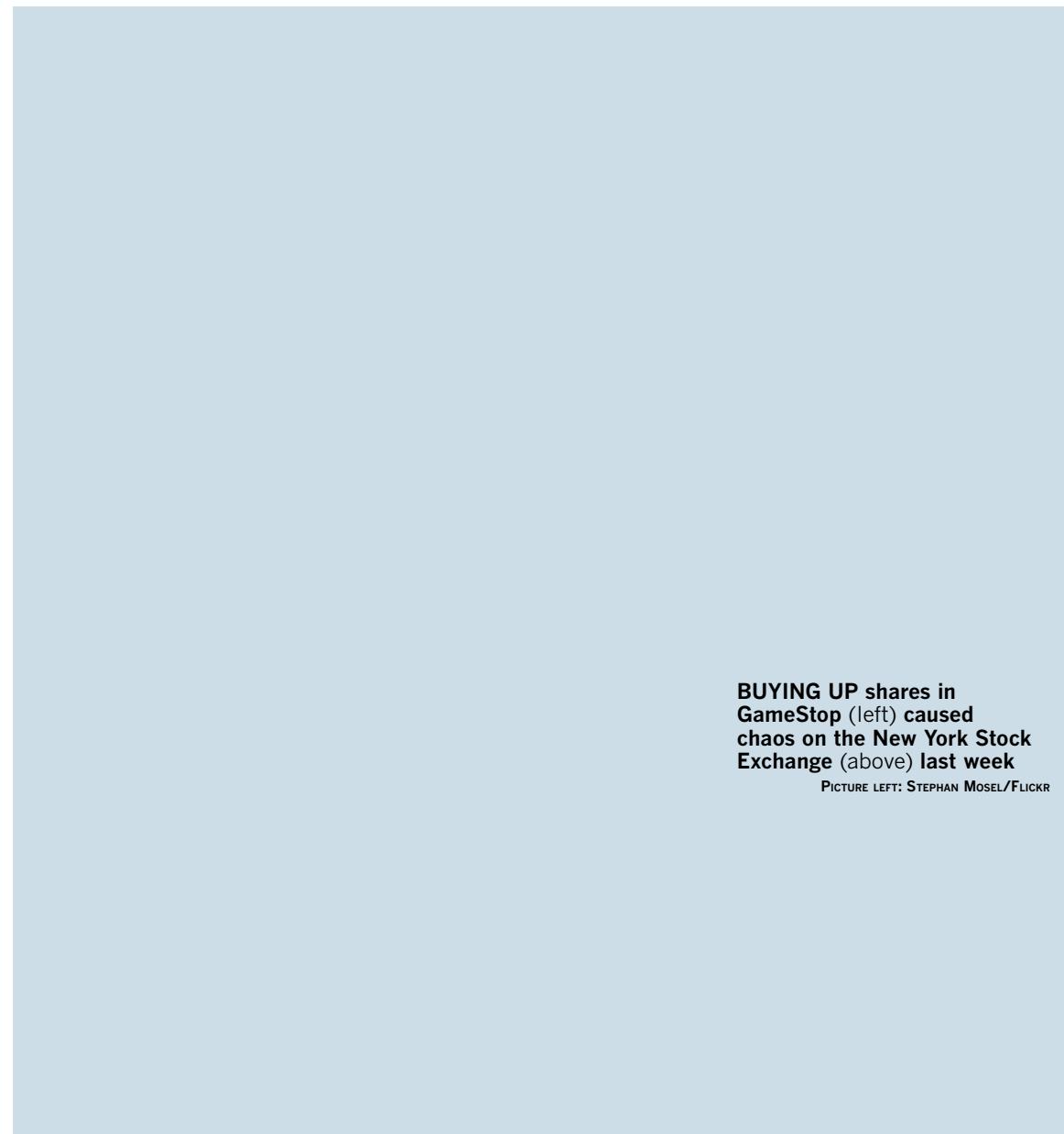
Stinking

The episode only exposes how speculating and gambling on other people’s money can make others stinking rich. That trader now has stock worth £36 million.

Wall Street is furious that amateur investors have “rigged” the market. They know all about rigging the system.

Had Walmart diverted half the money it spent buying its own shares, one million of its lowest paid workers could have had a 50 percent pay rise. But Walmart was more interested in pushing its share prices up.

Calls have been made to suspend GameStop trading for a 30-day cooling off period. Big hedge funds have accused online investors of



BUYING UP shares in GameStop (left) caused chaos on the New York Stock Exchange (above) last week

PICTURE LEFT: STEPHAN MOSEL/Flickr

STOCK MARKET

Casinos to help bosses get richer

THE BANK system and the stock exchange can provide a means of financing investment for some bosses and a place to put the profits of others.

Capitalists constantly move their money around. Some save cash in a bank and hope to invest it at a later date.

The bank can then lend this money to a different capitalist who wants to invest now.

Companies issue shares to raise money. Shares promise their buyers a “dividend”—a payout from the future profits that will be made as a result of the investment.

But most share trading often has little to do with productive investment.

Huge capitalist casinos have developed, such as New York’s Wall Street or London’s City.

In these, the rich can speculate on the changing values of stocks and shares, currency prices, and a myriad of other investments.

So share selling, where people can buy shares in private companies, have raised a total of £479 billion in the US over the past 20 years.

Over that same period, the 500 largest companies in the US spent 30 times that, some £6 trillion, buying their own stock just to boost their own prices.

For instance, the drug company Merck insists that it must charge high prices for medicine in order to pay for new research.

In 2018, the company spent £7 billion on research and development—and £11 billion on share repurchases and dividends.

Companies can also bet on their own instability. The Volatility Index (Vix) is a measure of how volatile the US stock market is. Traders bet millions on the future position of the index.

Betting on a horse doesn’t make it run faster. These activities do not generate new wealth or expand production.

They represent the gambling of profits already created by workers—and ultimately they depend on the health of the real economy.

How do hedge funds work?

HEDGE FUNDS are largely unregulated pools of money from the biggest financial institutions and the extremely wealthy.

Their stated purpose is to minimise some of the risks in financial markets—to “hedge” the bets.

In reality, funds typically take enormous risks. Many invest heavily in complex financial instruments known as derivatives.

Futures contracts involve placing enormous bets on

what the price of a commodity will be at a given time.

Futures are the simplest examples of derivatives—financial instruments whose value is “derived” from another, simpler instrument.

Rather than holding debts and collecting interest payments, companies merge them together and sell them as bonds. Others then gamble on the prices of these bonds. This is not a harmless activity—it is gambling on famine and poverty.

gambling, not investing. Yet they constantly gamble on falling stocks.

And they want revenge—by “regulating” the market to protect the “legitimate” institution of Wall Street.

For ordinary people, the stock market offers nothing. The top 1 percent of US households own 53 percent of US stock market wealth, with the top 10 percent owning 93 percent.

Working class people should fight against the world of investment that benefits the few. The destruction of the financial elite won’t come about by trying to win their game.

On other pages...

British Gas workers strike back

>>Page 20

Protests in Russia take aim at Putin and poverty

Alexei Navalny supporters are on the streets but have no more to offer working people than Vladimir Putin

THOUSANDS OF people in over 80 cities across Russia defied a heavy police presence to protest last Sunday in support of jailed opposition activist Alexei Navalny.

Up to 40,000 gathered in Moscow. They chanted, "Free Navalny" and, "Down with the Tsar."

Russian authorities cracked down on demonstrators in an effort to prevent a repeat of scenes the week before.

Then protesters threw snowballs at riot police, shut down traffic and fought off attempts to arrest them.

These are the biggest rallies against President Vladimir Putin in years. One protester in Moscow said, "Moscow looks like a fortress today.

"They can stop us when there are not enough of us but as more come it's going to be impossible."

In Vladivostok on the Pacific coast, protesters chanted, "My Russia sits in prison!" after they were chased onto the ice over the frozen Amur Bay.

Detain

A few hundred protesters gathered in Yakutsk, the world's coldest city, for a second week despite temperatures of minus 43C.

Over 5,000 arrests were made last Sunday across the country.

Videos on social media showed police using tear gas and Tasers to detain protesters in Moscow.

Navalny was arrested on 17 January after returning to Russia

from Germany. He was receiving treatment for nerve agent poisoning that he claims the state is responsible for.

He was set to face trial on Tuesday this week for not complying with a suspended sentence.

Navalny has highlighted the corruption of the Putin government. He recently released a video alleging oligarchs spent billions on a lavish palace for Putin on the Black Sea coast.

After the film racked up more than 100 million views on YouTube, Putin denied he owned the property and likened Navalny to a "terrorist" for organising the rallies.

Neoliberal

However, Navalny is no friend of the working class. He is a self-described nationalist who also peddles anti-immigration views.

He's a neoliberal and co-organiser of the annual far right "Russian March". The march attracts fascists, antisemites and Islamophobes.

But he has struck a chord because of the desperate state of Russia today.

Years of precarious employment conditions and inequality have led to widespread bitter anger against the government.

According to official figures, 4.4 million people were unemployed last year, a growth of almost 25 percent from 2019. Over half of these receive no unemployment benefits at all.

Covid-19 has struck the most vulnerable in Russia the hardest, highlighting harsh inequality.

Russia's workers and the poor need opposition, but from a very different source to Navalny.

And they should beware the manoeuvres of Britain, the United States and the European Union who will seek to profit from hypocritically denouncing state violence.

On other pages...

The fight continues for abortion rights in Poland >>Page 3



RUSSIAN PROTESTERS face off with riot police

INDIA

Far right moves to smash farmers

A COALITION of far right thugs, police and government ministers are out to smash the Indian farmers' movement.

A huge "tractor protest" last week put thousands on the streets across the country as part of a fight against new agriculture laws introduced by the government of Narendra Modi.

In the wake of the protest all manner of right wing figures declared the movement "violent" and part of a plot to destabilise India.

This was a signal to mobs organised by Hindu nationalist hate groups, including the fascist RSS, to take action. They joined

with militarised police in an effort to smash up farmers' protest camps at sites on the edges of New Delhi.

Farmers at the Ghazipur camp, which has been in place since November, stood firm. They successfully appealed for more people to join them and help defend the protest.

Crackdown

Balwinder Singh was among those who had rushed into the camp from Meerut, a city 50 miles east of Delhi, on Thursday night when he heard of an impending crackdown.

"The police attempt to remove

the protesters last night was an assault on the dignity of farmers," he said.

Similar attacks took place at camps in Singhu, to the north of the city, and the Tikri Border, to the west. Large groups of smartly dressed people posing as "locals" were filmed throwing rocks at farmers and tearing at tents.

The police announced a wave of "investigations" into leading figures in the movement in the hope of taking them out of the struggle.

It is now vital that unions throw their weight behind the farmers and open up a new front against the Modi regime.

MYANMAR

Military takeover seizes Aung San Suu Kyi

MYANMAR'S military seized power on Monday this week after detaining civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and members of her government.

The coup follows a highly contested election last November that saw Suu Kyi's party receive a landslide. Suu Kyi

appealed for people to "protest against the coup".

But her own reputation as a democrat is a sham.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner, once a darling of the West, defended the military when it ran amok in Rakhine state in 2017. The army drove

over 740,000 Muslim Rohingya people into exile in Bangladesh.

In the resulting slaughter thousands of Rohingya were raped, mutilated and murdered, and their villages totally destroyed.

When the military was subsequently accused of

genocide, Suu Kyi went to the Hague court to support them.

A genuine return to democracy cannot happen until everyone in Myanmar is given citizenship rights—and the Rohingya refugees are allowed to return home.



A year of failures

AS WE hit over 100,000 Covid-19 deaths in Britain, let's remember Boris Johnson's deadly decisions that led to this crisis.

Last March the government abandoned finding, testing and tracing all cases. He embraced the deadly idea of "herd immunity", to justify a do-nothing approach.

Health secretary Matt Hancock lied that a "protective ring" had been placed around care homes, but in fact most had already been infected with the virus.

When the Tories turned back towards testing and tracing, they ignored existing public health expertise and paid profiteers Serco and Deloitte to set up a new system.

Crucially, they virtually ignored the isolate and support element of such a system.

Let's note that countries as diverse as Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, Senegal and Vietnam have deployed well-established methods to drive down circulation of the killer virus.

The new vaccines will hopefully pull us out of the emergency, but the current virus is unlikely to be the last to jump from animals to humans.

This is thanks to unsustainable agricultural methods pursued both by capitalist food companies and by the right wing governments that promote their interests.

We need to fight for a new society where food production and public health move forward together in our interests, not in the interests of private profit.

Mike Killian
 Manchester



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

Just a thought...

Justice for Kevin Clarke

ON READING your article about Kevin Clarke's death (Socialist Worker, 25 January) I was shocked that the ambulance workers were said to have stood and watched.

Where's the duty of care, and what part of "I can't breathe" is difficult to understand?

It's heartbreaking, and those involved in such poor decision making should be held accountable.

Paula Clarkson
 On Facebook

I WAS just about to ask the question, "Was he black?"

I then saw the photo. Does anyone ever learn?
Lou Lou Wright
 On Facebook

More vaccine data needed

NHS ENGLAND really should have been collecting ethnicity data on who was receiving the Covid-19 vaccine, (Socialist Worker online, 27 January).

It's very remiss not to, considering the impact the pandemic had on black and Asian communities.

It should also be collecting data on sexuality.

I believe the pandemic is having a bigger effect on gay and transgender communities too.

Tom Woodward
 On Facebook

New tunnel will hit poor

IT IS almost always poorer and disadvantaged areas and populations who experience the harms of pollution most.

The proposed Silvertown Tunnel development is no exception (Socialist Worker, 25 January).

Gerry Mooney
 On Twitter

Trade union bosses should step up fight

LIKE MANY trade unionists, I was disappointed that Labour right winger and continuity candidate Christina McAnea won the recent Unison union general secretary election.

But it was even worse to hear her on the BBC's Women's Hour radio programme, boasting about her record compared with other trade union leaders.

She said that other "blustery" trade union leaders called strikes but failed to carry them off.

And promised that under her leadership, Unison would only call walkouts if it intended to see them through.

But she is in charge of a union that has singularly failed to issue serious action in industries absolutely battered by the Covid-19 crisis.

Unison boasts it has over 1.3 million members—it's time it called its workers out to fight the attacks that are still to come.

Lyn Whittemore
 Essex

Islamophobe reviews racist programme

IT IS ridiculous that William Shawcross has been appointed the head of a much-delayed review into the government's racist Prevent programme.

Shawcross has a history of Islamophobic views. So why would the government get him to head an inquiry into a scheme that mainly targets Muslim students?

He's written about his support for Guantanamo Bay and the use of torture, so why wouldn't he support that for people referred under Prevent?

But it's not surprising that the ruling class is



Shawcross—Islamophobic views

appointing people with Islamophobic views to top positions.

At the same time at Shawcross' appointment, there's no one investigating the Islamophobia in the Tory party.

The government is hoping that allegations of Islamophobia will fade away if there's nobody looking.

We need to get rid of Prevent. It's racist, and by the government's own measures, it doesn't work.

Something like just 10 percent of people referred to the programme are investigated.

We need to scrap Prevent and hold a proper investigation into how it was allowed to exist in the first place.

Naima Omar
 East London

Work should be made safe

THE 500 coronavirus cases at DVLA Swansea are shocking (Socialist Worker, 25 January).

DVLA staff really should have been sent home and the building made safe.

Are they trying to get people killed?
@Breiddalurblom
 On Twitter

A group of mainly black single mothers at Prospect House face pollution, unsafe homes, rodent infestations—and now the risk of homelessness. Residents told Isabel Ringrose that racism worsens their appalling treatment. Pictures by Guy Smallman

RESIDENTS OF Prospect House in London live in a squalid, shoddily converted office block on the bank of the six-lane North Circular Road. And now they face eviction.

Socialist Worker revealed the tenants' horrific housing conditions back in 2019. Today their complaints still go ignored, and on top of that, they are threatened with homelessness.

Residents say the reasons for their appalling treatment are clear. "We are all from low-income families," said Miss Miller. "And we're all minorities."

L'Oreal, another resident, said, "My housing will fall down to my skin colour. Our block has no white people. The majority of us are black single parents."

Fadya also lives in the block. She told Socialist Worker, "We've always got issues with rodents outside, issues with the bins, the front door and the gate doesn't lock. Nothing gets fixed properly and we feel unsafe."

"The landlord doesn't care."

Prospect House is owned by a private landlord. Homeless families are housed in flats on a five-year lease managed by Shepherds Bush Housing Association. But it was Brent council that housed them in the dangerous block.

It's a confusing chain of command that helps all three avoid responsibility for the building, and its vulnerable residents.

Landlord

Fadya said, "When tenants ring the landlord with problems, he says it's nothing to do with him and to call Shepherds Bush."

"He says he's not the landlord. He may tell you to stop calling his number, but he's also told us to ring him directly with maintenance issues and not Shepherds Bush."

Miss Miller added, "We're passed between the two. No one wants to take responsibility and they're blaming it on each other."

"No one wants to take responsibility—until the rent is due."

Tenants often go without running water, heating and hot water for days or weeks on end. "Nobody wants to spend money on us," explained resident Karwan.

Fadya added, "Each household has different needs."

"Some have children with learning disabilities, others have young children, elderly and sick people. We can't all be treated the same."

Residents are also angry that they pay for heating when the flats are stifling. Fadya said, "The house is so humid and in the summer it's even warmer. And you can't open the windows—it's ridiculous."

"It wasn't made to be a home. There's no neighbours or shops nearby. It's embarrassing."

Living on an industrial estate on the North Circular, the most polluted road in London, is not child friendly, safe or healthy.

"People walk past and stare," said Karwan. "They can't believe we live



PROSPECT House
(top) is a shoddy and run down office block in Brent, west London. It has been converted into miserable flats that sit just above a six-lane trunk road. It is infested with rodents (middle). Repairs are only rarely carried out as the landlord denies responsibility (above). Commercial waste is often flytipped outside the building (right)



PROSPECT House
(top) is a shoddy and run down office block in Brent, west London. It has been converted into miserable flats that sit just above a six-lane trunk road. It is infested with rodents (middle). Repairs are only rarely carried out as the landlord denies responsibility (above). Commercial waste is often flytipped outside the building (right)



OUR HOMES UNDER THE HAMMER

'This housing system is designed to keep people low'

HOMELESS PEOPLE must prove the council has a duty to house them in order to get help. That duty is discharged when long term housing is found—including in the private rented sector.

L'Oreal's son has several medical conditions, but her original bid for housing in 2015 was incorrectly banded in a low priority category.

That meant she was offered a flat in Prospect House—and told that if she rejected it, there would be no more assistance.

"I've been trying to get Brent Council to appeal their decision that they have discharged their housing duty, because this flat is not safe," L'Oreal explained. "But they rejected my application and said it was suitable."

Her daughter suffers from sleep apnoea due to the noise and pollution from the busy main road. "I'm told it's my fault," she said.

"When my daughter is trying to sleep and not breathing so I have to move her head—how do I fix that?"

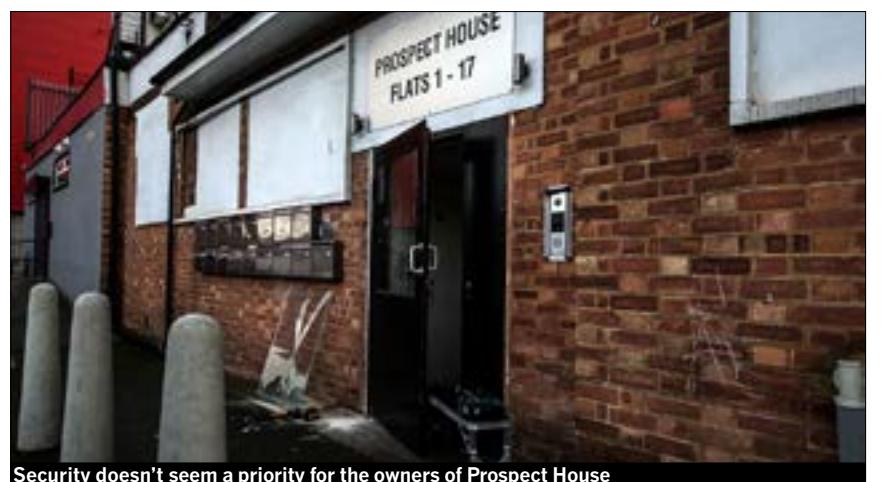
"Brent council don't care, they fob you off. My case was discharged, and it's taken five years and two long applications for me to prove Brent has a duty to rehouse me. They don't look into cases properly."

After years of stress, L'Oreal has been diagnosed with Graves' disease, which causes an overactive thyroid. Now she faces even more stress.

"Landlords are all about profit," she said. "My worry is that I'm put into the private rented sector and I have to go through this all over again."

"I want to come off benefits because it's a trap. There is a stigma making you feel not enough and unworthy and dirty."

"The system was designed to keep people low and to stay low. There is enough stigma in society for being black Caribbean."



Security doesn't seem a priority for the owners of Prospect House

'My kids ask me, Mummy where are we going to go?'

THE 15 families at Prospect House are being evicted because the lease is running out.

London councils pay landlords to house homeless people because of a lack of social housing. But this profit-hungry landlord plans to redevelop the site and build four more floors.

He told residents the block was being demolished. They must now struggle their way through the tangled web of homelessness regulations to get help.

"They're given up fighting the landlord.

"There's no point because in the end he will win.

It's the landlord's word against the tenants. Anything he says is gospel."

When tenants ring the landlord with problems, he says that it is nothing to do with him



are forced to leave London. And it's not just a problem in Brent—it's one for council tenants across Britain.

Britain's housing crisis has seen skyrocketing numbers of homeless people and a dire lack of council housing. But countless new sites sell flats at eye-watering prices that are often left empty.

"We would all be happy for this place to go," said Miss Miller. "They could rehouse us. When I look out my window, I can see so many new buildings that are fully developed. Why can't they move us into those flats across the way?"

We've all got children and worry for people's mental health. We can only rely on each other

"We've got young kids so we need to be in this catchment area. But they might send us outside London. Are we supposed to start a whole new life?"

Angela described the stressful situation she has been left in. "I pay part housing benefit which most landlords do not take," she said.

"They are supposed to by law, but they make excuses. Estate agents ask for guarantors who can provide up to £65,000. But I don't know anyone who has that."

"Last week an estate agent called me and said the landlord didn't want me as a tenant. I have a feeling it was because of my housing benefits."

"I'm here with my son and when it comes to May I don't know what I'm going to do. You email and call the housing officer from the council, but they don't reply."

Angela said she didn't mind leaving Prospect House but said the issue is where she will move to. "I don't want to stay here, but I want an option of where I can move to," she said.

"Not knowing where I'm going is always on my mind."

Fadya is in a similar situation. "I celebrated when I got the section



RAT TRAP boxes have been installed but are never collected or emptied (top)
Meanwhile, rubbish builds up in communal areas (above)



RAT TRAP boxes have been installed but are never collected or emptied (top)
Meanwhile, rubbish builds up in communal areas (above)

Read more Socialist Worker articles

Driving out the homeless

by Tomáš Tengely-Evans

bit.ly/Prospect0419

Labour promises end to slum office housing—but Labour councils still send tenants to live in them

by Alistair Farrow

bit.ly/HousingandLabourCouncils

Prospect House exposes what is wrong with housing in Britain

by Alistair Farrow

bit.ly/Prospect0519

WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We oppose discrimination against disabled people including those who experience mental distress.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions. To join us, turn to page 16 or go to www.swp.org.uk or phone 020 7840 5602

Socialist Workers Party online meetings



The Egyptian Revolution—why it matters 10 years on

BIRMINGHAM
Wed 10 Feb, 7pm
281-634-5938

HOME COUNTIES
Thu 18 Feb, 5.30pm
915 511 1297

LONDON: SOUTH EAST
Thu 11 Feb, 7pm
529-913-6390

BRADFORD
Thu 11 Feb, 7pm
885 9187 7552

LANCASHIRE
Thu 11 Feb, 7pm
992-204-9372

MANCHESTER & WIGAN
Wed 10 Feb, 7.15pm
323-178-7151

BRIGHTON & HOVE
Thu 11 Feb, 6.30pm
841 2142 3683

LONDON: HACKNEY
Thu 11 Feb, 7.30pm
798-534-2585

NORWICH
Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm
906-652-5299

BRISTOL
Thu 11 Feb,
7.30pm
688-397-3148

LONDON: SOUTH
Wed 10 Feb, 7pm
497-196-1801

PORTSMOUTH & SOUTHAMPTON
Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm
488-934-2809

BLACK COUNTRY
Pamphlet launch: *Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics*

Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm

352 891 2411

CAMBRIDGE

Book launch: *The revolutionary politics of Angela Davis*

Thu 11 Feb,

7.30pm

681-800-4408

With author Naima Omar

CARDIFF

Why are the police racist?

Wed 10 Feb,

7.30pm

630-181-4857

CHESTERFIELD

Disability—a very capitalist condition

Thu 11 Feb,

6.30pm

829-532-8731

COLCHESTER
The origins of LGBT+ oppression

Thu 11 Feb, 7.30pm

894 7239 0044

COVENTRY

Can Biden put the US back together again?

Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm

823-945-1917

DUNDEE, ABERDEEN & PERTH

Engels—a celebration of his revolutionary life

Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm

894 2628 7708

EAST MIDLANDS

Indian workers and farmers—mass revolt against Modi

Wed 10 Feb, 7pm

354-874-4790

EDINBURGH

Trump, the far right and the US under Biden

Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm

431-459-112

EXETER
Can capitalism be free of racism?

Thu 18 Feb,

7.30pm

865-2972-2883

GLASGOW

Pamphlet launch: *Pride Politics & Protest—A Revolutionary Guide to LGBT+ Politics*

Thu 11 Feb, 6.30pm

851-5254-7239

HARLOW

After Trump—is the nightmare over?

Thu 11 Feb,

7.30pm

832-8746-7480

HUDDERSFIELD

How coronavirus has worsened institutional racism

Wed 10 Feb,

6.30pm

431-168-1804



The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions.

Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and just before the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. **The password for all meetings is 967537.**

Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty for news of national online meetings and other updates.

KENT
Indian workers and farmers—mass revolt against Modi

Thu 11 Feb,

7pm

874-012-7970

LONDON: NEWHAM
What are the origins of LGBT+ oppression?

Wed 10 Feb,

7.30pm

288-098-8827

LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS
The origins of LGBT+ oppression

Wed 10 Feb,

7.30pm

818-391-0420

LONDON: WEST AND NORTH WEST
The legacy of Mary Wollstonecraft—pioneer of women's liberation

Thu 11 Feb,

7.30pm

824-3598-9096

NEWCASTLE
The origins of LGBT+ oppression

Wed 10 Feb, 7pm

368-595-2712

OXFORD & THAMES VALLEY
Can there be a progressive patriotism?

Wed 10 Feb, 7pm

861 2001 6477

SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE
Fighting racism and fascism—the united front in theory and practice

Thu 11 Feb, 7pm

528-174-9278

SWANSEA & WEST WALES
Islamophobia and racism—the politics of fear

Thu 11 Feb, 7pm

902-964-963

YORK & SCARBOROUGH
How can we get 'zero Covid'?

Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm

827-489-7492

MOVEMENT EVENTS

DEVON & DORSET
Slavery, reparations and the challenge to Richard Drax

Wed 9 Feb, 7.30pm

706-382-3359

Organised by Stand Up To Racism

LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST
People Before Profit launch meeting

Wed 10 Feb, 7.30pm

bit.ly/39rtvRZ

CONTACT THE SWP

Phone 020 7840 5600
Email enquiries@swp.org.uk
Post PO Box 74955 London E16 9EJ

BOOKMARKS the socialist bookshop

The Labour Party—A Marxist History
by Tony Cliff, Donny Gluckstein and Charlie Kimber, £14.99

A Rebel's Guide to Engels by Camilla Royle £4

Does privilege explain racism? by Esme Choonara, Ken Olende, Yuri Prasad and Weyman Bennett, £3

Transgender Resistance by Laura Miles £10

PHONE 020 7637 1848 WEB bookmarksbookshop.co.uk

Masterpiece drama tells the hidden stories of Aids crisis

It's a Sin is both a joyful celebration of self expression—and an angry tribute to those whose lives were betrayed by homophobia, writes **Isabel Ringrose**

RUSSELL T DAVIES' new masterpiece *It's a Sin* follows gay men living during the Aids crisis in 1980s Britain.

It portrays the brutal reality of how HIV/Aids tore lives apart and was allowed to spread because of rampant, top-down homophobia.

The stigma LGBT+ people already experienced was heightened by the outbreak of HIV/Aids in 1981. It was ignorantly “associated with the homosexual population”.

But *It's a Sin* is also about the new freedom, pride and self-expression of young gay men embracing their sexuality. It pays tribute to those taken by the virus and those left behind.

The series follows five friends, from their sexual awakening as they start new lives in London, to suffering through the crisis in different ways. Their experiences represent countless more hidden and harrowing stories.

Ritchie meets Jill and Ash at university and soon fully embraces life as a young gay man. Roscoe leaves home wearing a skirt and makeup and befriends Ritchie, Jill, Ash and later Colin in a gay bar.

Haunting

Colin also befriends Henry, his gay co-worker, who lives with his partner of 30 years. The haunting realisation of HIV/Aids creeps into their lives when Henry's partner becomes ill with a rare “pneumonia”.

Soon after, Henry is diagnosed with “cancer” and is locked in a hospital room alone, unable to contact his partner. Dying partners were often separated by families or bigoted doctors.

The five characters have the world at their feet. But we are aware of the impending horror.

News of gay men dying from sex starts to seep into the conversation. And sections of the media begin to discuss the “gay cancer”.

Ritchie dismisses the virus as a homophobic slur, showing the danger of misinformation.

But as talk of HIV/Aids starts to spread so does the anger at the limited information available.

Jill calls it “a great big killer disease and it's happening in silence”. She wants friends to be aware of the virus and later supports them through their illnesses.

She tells them not to blame other men, but those promoting propaganda and preventing access to treatment. Her mother,



POLICE ATTACK protesters in *It's a Sin*

who is played by the real-life Jill, says, “If we had heterosexual boys dying in these numbers the world would've stopped.”

The disease is shown in all its cruelty and there is rage at the lack of dignity victims were given. Government information about the virus is eventually released, but it's too little too late.

And the stigmatisation does not disappear. At an “Aids needs Aid” protest bystanders scream homophobic abuse at the demonstrators.

Joy and heartbreak are poignantly portrayed in the series. The acting, music and character development play a vital role in telling the story. The characters fight for the truth behind their deaths to be exposed. One character reminisces on the fun he had with his lovers, unwilling to let those memories die with him.

It's A Sin shows people hit by the tragic reality of HIV/Aids, who watch friends fall ill and disappear, but fight back in defiance.

Watch the full series at channel4.com, or weekly on Channel 4 on Fridays at 9pm. Episode three shows 5 February

The fight against the stigma—then and now

IN LIVING memory countless gay men died alone, out of shame, from Aids.

The fear many felt of their sexuality being exposed was magnified by fear of catching the virus. Victims were shunned, seen as dirty and a public menace.

Over 30 million people worldwide have died from Aids since the start of the epidemic.

And for young LGBT+ people, *It's A Sin* shows us a hidden history.

The Tories introduced Section 28—which banned the “promotion of homosexuality” in schools—at the peak of the crisis.

This has had lasting damage on our education of LGBT+ struggles.

The series also gives a vital education on what HIV and Aids are, and how they spread.

Nowadays medicine is available that allows people with HIV to have long and healthy lives with the virus untransmittable and undetectable in their bodies. And PrEP pills prevent contraction of HIV.

In Britain in 2019, 94 percent of people living with HIV knew they had it and 98 percent of those were on treatment.

But stigma still exists—rules banning gay and bisexual men from giving blood in Britain were only relaxed in December 2020.

And medication is far from being available to everyone worldwide.

DOCUMENTARY

CRACK: COCAINE, CORRUPTION & CONSPIRACY
Available now on Netflix

IN THIS new Netflix documentary, a timeline of events unfold during the period of the “crack epidemic” which began in the early 1980s in US cities.

The documentary builds on archive footage and interviews with former drug dealers, users and journalists to paint a picture of what crack meant for black neighborhoods.

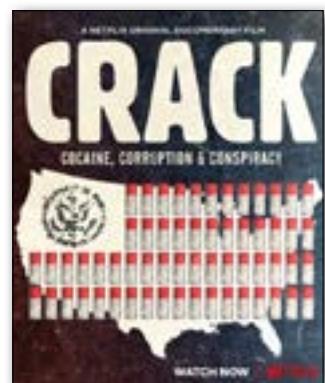
It also focuses on the politics of the “war on drugs” began by president Ronald Reagan.

Anti-drug rhetoric—the infamous “Just Say No” campaign for instance—paid little genuine regard for the black people whose lives and neighbourhoods were torn apart by crack.

At the beginning cops largely ignored what was happening and in fact actively took part in drug dealing and other forms of corruption.

They later went on to target and arrest black people, ending in mass incarceration.

An important part of



the film focuses on the experience of black women and the myth of “crack babies”.

This was a moral panic hyped up by the media claiming that pregnant women were causing addictions in their babies.

There was never scientific evidence to back up this claim.

The documentary also highlights the shady role of the CIA and the military in ignoring or actively facilitating drug smuggling.

It formed part of their secret involvement in supporting right wing militias and using the proceeds from drug deals to fund a right wing coup in Nicaragua.

Ordinary people were secondary to the needs of the US's interests in controlling South America.

Crack is an indictment of the hypocrisy and racism at the heart of the US establishment.

Blythe Taylor

WHAT is it that makes some black people reluctant to get the coronavirus vaccine?

Polling in both Britain and the US shows that they are among the least likely to say they will get vaccinated. This is despite being at up to four times greater risk of dying from Covid-19 than white people.

Mainstream commentators dwell on the supposed hold of religious ideas, unfounded fears and exposure to conspiracy theories among ethnic minorities. Underlying their talk is the assumption that rejecting the vaccine is an act of stupidity.

But there are many rational reasons why black people in particular have little faith in the medical establishment—including patterns of poor care that reflect racist practice.

A little-discussed reason for vaccine reticence is the way that scientific racism has in the past been used to justify the most hideous experiments on black people.

The most infamous of these was carried out in the US Deep South and became known as the Tuskegee Study.

Starting in 1932, 600 black men from Alabama were used as guinea pigs in an experimental study into syphilis, a potentially deadly sexually transmitted disease. The United States Public Health Service's stated goal was to "observe the natural history of untreated syphilis" in black populations.

But the researchers who came to town never told their subjects this—instead it was said they would be treated for "bad blood".

Over the course of forty years, the medical wing of the state contrived to keep secret the true nature of its ongoing operation.

Unlike a later US study in Guatemala, the men in Tuskegee were not deliberately infected with syphilis.

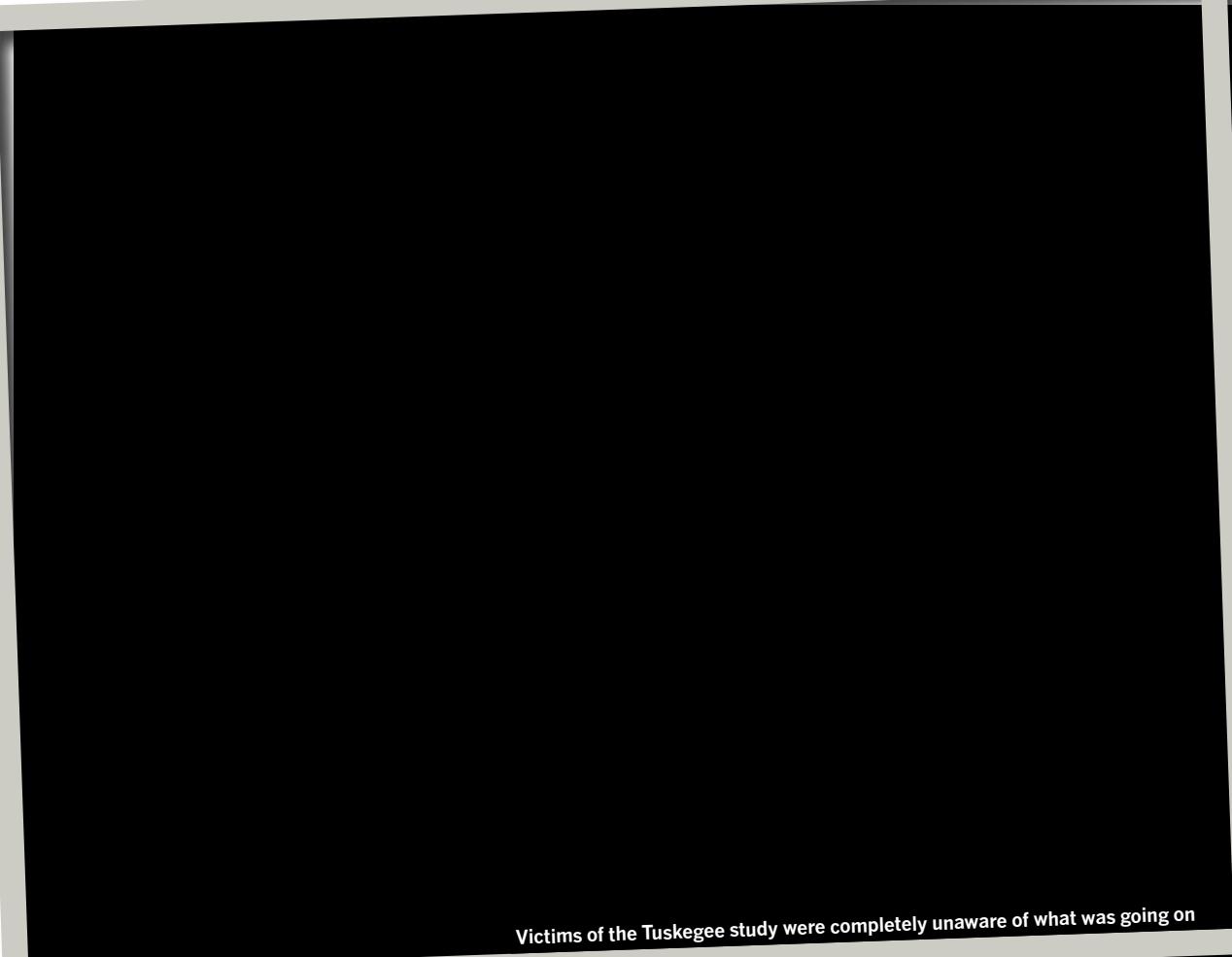
Instead, subjects were split into two groups.

NONE were people who had tested positive for syphilis but were unaware, and never subsequently told by the researchers. The other group was negative and equally uninformed.

Both were given deliberately ineffective remedies to further their belief that they were being treated for fatigue or anaemia.

The study only wanted to see what happened to those with the disease but without medical care. As such, the authorities went to great lengths to ensure their subjects never found out about their infection—and that meant making sure that no one else treated them either.

In 1934, the study leaders told local doctors about the



Victims of the Tuskegee study were completely unaware of what was going on

RACIST PAST FEEDS FEAR OF VACCINE

There are fears that some black people will reject the Covid-19 vaccine. Socialist Worker looks at how abhorrent treatment at the hands of the state and doctors is to blame

experiment and instructed them not to diagnose syphilis in any of their subjects. In 1941 many men were drafted into the army, and were found on examination to have the disease.

Doctors arranged for them to be discharged from service and sent home without explanation.

Across the US in the 1940s treatment for syphilis rapidly improved when antibiotics became widely available and rapid treatment centres opened.

Many of the participants, thinking they were already

being treated for their illnesses by kindly doctors, never sought out the treatment centres, and instead carried on deteriorating.

By 1965 the study bosses were arguing in small medical circles that it was too late to give penicillin to people in their research as the disease had already progressed too far. But it was another lie.

The antibiotic remains recommended for all stages of its treatment even today.

It wasn't until a whistleblower inside the programme leaked

“Many, thinking they were being treated for their illnesses, never sought out treatment”

“A feeling of shame”
—Lillie Head

information about Tuskegee to the New York Times newspaper in 1972 that the experiment finally ended.

By then only 74 of the original 600 men were alive. Out of that 600, some 128 had died of the disease or complications, 40 had infected their partners, and 19 of their children had contracted it congenitally.

But the terrible effects of the study went far wider.

In 1980, Tuskegee revelations were still reverberating across the US. A university study shows that by then the fear of medicine and doctors had risen dramatically among black people.

That meant that all manner of illnesses went untreated, and, as a result, life expectancy among black men over 45 had fallen on average by over a year.

THE CLOSER you lived to Alabama, the more scared you were, and the more life you lost. But the investigation also revealed that the story of Tuskegee spread far and wide and affected black consciousness across the country.

Lillie Head's father, Freddie Lee Tyson, was one of those studied. When the truth came out she describes a wave of distrust hitting her community. "There was a feeling of shame," she said. "The feeling of being betrayed by people you thought were there to help and protect you."

To understand what could drive the medical establishment into thinking that this horror show was a legitimate scientific enquiry we have to understand the twisted nature of American racism.

Even after the US Civil War formally ended slavery, the notion of black people as a separate and inferior species to whites was common, and widely supported in scientific circles.

Doctors routinely talked of a hierarchy of races with whites at the top, and black people at the bottom.

Former slaves, they said, were "riddled with imperfections from head to toe", and that they didn't know true pain because of their "primitive nervous systems".

The scientific establishment had an obsession with race and sex, and in particular the idea that black people's brains were underdeveloped but that their sexual organs were "over developed".

This fed into another great racist fear—that black men might have relations with white women, and that the white race might then be "polluted".

These delusions stood behind the syphilis study.

The authorities that commissioned it wanted to prove a form of black male promiscuity lay behind poor health outcomes and thereby confirm their own superiority.

ANAS MUSTAFA suffered brain damage as a result of an illegal Pfizer trial

Bloody record of pharma firms—but it's right to get vaccine

MANY liberal commentators are today content to see Tuskegee as part of a banished past.

But, for example, much more recently Africans have repeatedly been used to test drugs in dubious circumstances—only then to be denied treatments they have helped develop.

In the 1990s Pfizer carried out tests in Nigeria of a new treatment for meningitis. Eleven children died in the trial.

Other participants suffered blindness, deafness and brain damage.

US physicians also conducted tests on HIV-positive Zimbabwean women in 1994.

Supposed The drug was supposed to stop mother to child transmission. But half the women were given a placebo, even though a proven treatment already existed.

As a result, an estimated 1,000 babies contracted HIV/AIDS.

In the 1960s and 70s establishment fears of "black delinquency" drove an attempt to limit the number of black babies. In the US, this led to a huge programme of sterilisation

that focused on black and Native American women.

In Britain, the contraceptive drug Depo-Provera was tested on black and Asian women without them being warned of the side effects.

There are allegations of women given the drug without consent, or while unconscious.

Black women's groups ran "Ban the Jab" campaigns and demanded both the right to safe contraception and the right to have as many children as they wanted.

For some, this history of medicalised racism melds with very contemporary examples of prejudice in the health service.

And the two taken together become a reason to suspect the coronavirus vaccine to be dangerous, or worse, part of a plot.

But the vaccine is neither of these. It would be a tragedy if fear of the jab drove many of those most at risk of coronavirus into turning down the vaccine.

To win back trust the NHS must be seen to be addressing racism in the medical establishment.

And black people must be at the forefront of the drive to allow local people more control over how the vaccine programme is run.

Despite understandable fears, the vaccine still offers the greatest protection against a virus that poses a huge risk to black people



READ MORE

● **Superior: The Return of Race Science**
by Angela Saini
£7.99

● **Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy**
by Susan M. Reverby
£27.99

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REVOLUTION

The Egyptian Revolution—how workers terrified bosses

A decade ago images of protests in Tahrir Square shook the world. Workers took the revolution to the next level, explains Sadie Robinson

TEN YEARS ago this week, huge crowds massed in Cairo's Tahrir Square demanding that dictator Hosni Mubarak resign. Days later, on 11 February 2011, he was gone.

Tahrir's mass protests were a highly visible part of the movement that forced Mubarak out. But a key part of the revolt was workers' action.

In the run-up to the revolution, strikes and sit-ins had shown that resistance to the dictatorship was possible. Textile workers in the industrial city of Mahalla staged a series of militant strikes from 2006.

The 2011 uprising began on 25 January and mass strikes erupted on 30 January. Workers struck in solidarity with the "youth of Tahrir" but raised their own demands too.

Workers' action took the revolution to a new level because it posed a different kind of threat to the ruling class.

Workers developed new ways of organising. The Federation of Independent Unions was founded in Tahrir Square on 30 January.

People in dozens of sectors set up new unions.

Workers' control became a live issue.

Some workers organised committees and ran things in defiance of the bosses.

Egypt's Iron and Steel workers demanded private firms be confiscated and run by "a new management by workers and technicians".

They called for a "workers' monitoring committee in all workplaces monitoring production, prices, distribution and wages".

They also wanted a "general assembly of all sectors and political trends of the people to develop a new constitution and elect real popular committees".

Control All of this posed a direct threat to bosses' control and suggested there could be a completely different way of running society. And the impact went beyond Egypt.

Some 8 percent of the world's seaborne trade passed through the Suez Canal, and global ruling classes invested heavily in Egypt.

Workers' control became a live issue.

Some workers organised committees and ran things in defiance of the bosses.

Egypt's Iron and Steel workers demanded private firms be confiscated and run by "a new management by workers and technicians".

They were able to do this because workers create the profits that capitalism relies on. And the fact that they could take charge of production is what really terrifies rulers everywhere. That's why they united to crush the revolt.

The revolution didn't bring about workers' control or socialism. But it showed the huge power that workers have and their potential to run society in the interests of the majority.

This is part of a series of articles on Egypt in revolution. Read our coverage at bit.ly/EgyptSW2021

Anti-racists slam move to shut out child refugees

by ISABEL RINGROSE

THE TORY government has slammed the door shut on unaccompanied child refugees trying to make it to safety in Britain.

Immigration minister Chris Philp announced last week that Britain would shut legal routes to Britain for people who have reached other European countries.

It's a deliberate attempt to roll back gains made by anti-racists on the rights of refugees.

It reverses the Dubs amendment that forced the Tory government to commit to taking some unaccompanied child refugees in May 2016.

The amendment, from Labour peer Alf Dubs, came after widespread support for refugees at the height of the crisis in the Mediterranean. The Tories fought to roll it back ever since.

The Dubs Amendment allowed in some child refugees, who were trapped at Britain's border in Calais. It was initially supposed to offer settlement to 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees. But it



REFUGEES AT Britain's border in northern France have to live in dire conditions

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was capped at 480 places and then further limited to 350.

The refugee charity Choose Love said Philp's announcement meant Britain had "turned its back on lone refugee children".

Philp confirmed that only unaccompanied children with relatives in Britain will now be permitted entry.

He further claimed that the government is prioritising resettling vulnerable refugees from dangerous conflict zones.

Zones

Yet Britain's resettlement process, which transfers refugees from conflict zones to Britain, is currently on hold due to the pandemic with no word when it will restart.

The Tories claimed that they couldn't find local authorities to take in child refugees. But refugee charity Safe Passage said that local councils were not at capacity and at least 25 had pledged over 1,400 places for child refugees.

Beth Gardiner-Smith, chief executive of Safe Passage International, described the desperate situation facing child refugees who have

already made it to Europe.

"Children alone in Europe are sleeping rough in the snow, in derelict buildings and in tents in overcrowded camps," she said.

By shutting legal routes, the Tories will force vulnerable children into the hands of people smugglers.

Stand Up To Racism (SUTR) campaigned alongside Lord Dubs to build solidarity with refugees.

Tower Hamlets SUTR co-convenor Sheila McGregor slammed the callous move. "Lord Dubs fought to get child refugees into this country, but that has been blocked by this government," she told Socialist Worker.

Sheila argued it was another step to make Britain's racist immigration system more brutal, pointing to the Tories' drive to deport more people on charter flights.

"We in Tower Hamlets are fighting to get two sons their father back after he was deported to Jamaica in February last year," she said.

It took a movement to win gains for refugee rights—and it will take resistance to defend them.

Biden's 'back to normal' plans aren't the change that's needed

Joe Biden has wasted no time in pushing through new warmongering and anti-immigration policies. **Nick Clark** and **Sophie Squire** investigate some of Joe Biden's first acts as president

US BOMBERS flew over the Persian Gulf—close to Iran—last week, while American soldiers are to be sent to new bases in preparation for war.

In a statement last Wednesday top US military commanders commented on this flight—the first since Joe Biden became president.

It was meant to show “the US military’s ability to deploy air power anywhere in the world to deter potential aggression”.

In other words it was a show of force—a threat against Iran.

The flyover came as Biden said he would not end harsh sanctions against Iran—which cause misery for ordinary Iranians—imposed by Donald Trump.

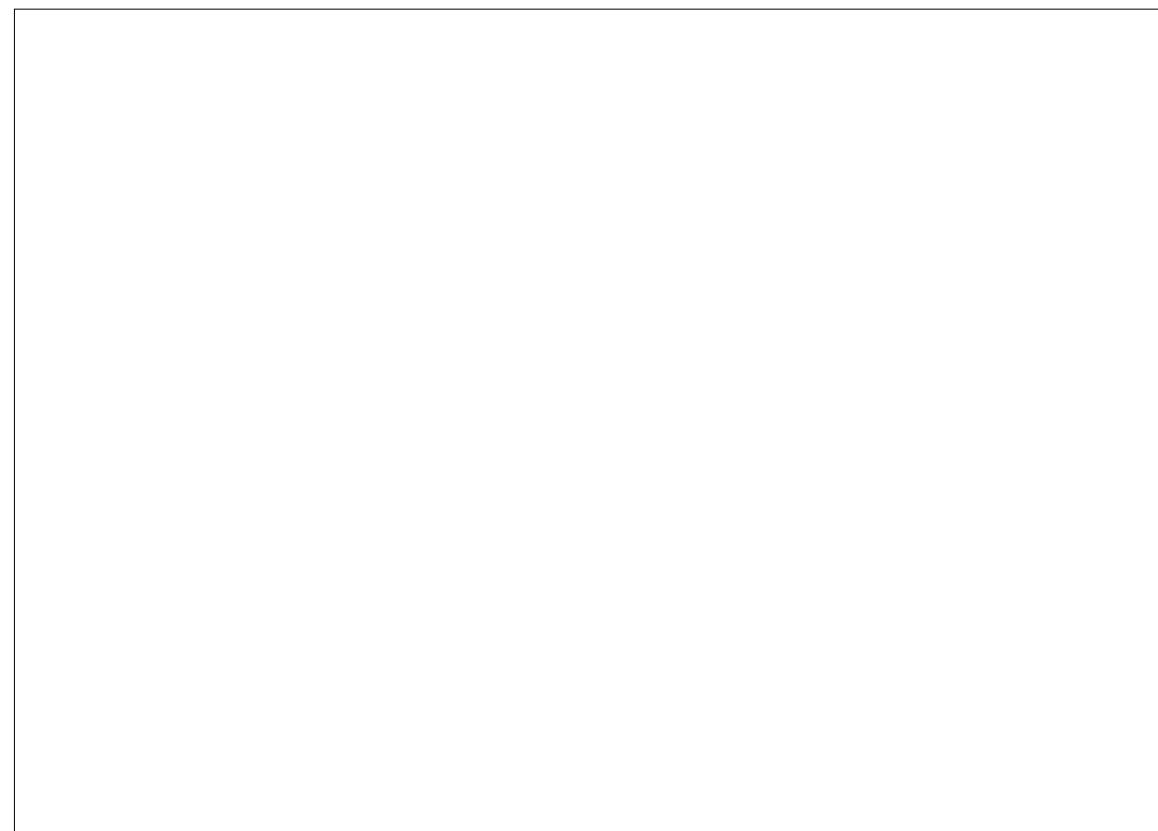
In the same week, the Wall Street Journal newspaper reported that the US is using new military bases in Saudi Arabia.

The bases—developed for the US by Saudi Arabia—can be used if fighting with Iran broke out.

When Biden ran for US president, he said he wanted to return to a “deal” with Iran signed under Barack Obama.

It was hailed as a break from Donald Trump, who scrapped the deal, imposed new sanctions and threatened war repeatedly.

But Biden has shown that there won’t be any return to the deal unless Iran submits to the US’s control of the Middle East.



PRESIDENT BIDEN has been busy plotting wars in his first week

Under Obama’s deal, the US agreed to end sanctions against Iran if it promised measures designed to stop it from developing nuclear weapons.

After the US’s disastrous war on Iraq, Iran had become more powerful in the Middle East—and a threat to US interests.

The deal was supposed to limit

Iran’s power. Instead Iran’s influence grew across the Middle East as the US relied on it to defeat Isis in Iraq and Syria.

When Trump became president

he imposed new sanctions on Iran and threatened war repeatedly. He wanted to unite the US’s allies against Iran.

It seemed to work as the UAE signed a deal with the US’s most important ally in the Middle East, Israel.

But not all of the ruling class in the West agreed. They worried that a war with Iran would further wreck their control of the Middle East.

Promised
Biden promised them a return to “stability”.

But that doesn’t mean a rejection of what Trump did—or safety for ordinary people in the Middle East.

Biden wants to build on the military alliances made under Trump between Israel and Arab states. And his secretary of state Antony Blinken said last week sanctions wouldn’t be lifted until at least June—and only then if Iran agrees to the US’s demands.

Biden talks about a return to normality.

In the Middle East that means the US enforcing its will through sanctions, threats and war.

In that case, Biden is not much different to Trump.



What's your story?

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Anti-racists promise, ‘They are going to see us on the streets’

PROTESTS HAVE begun against Joe Biden. He is being held to account for his immigration plans.

Around 200 Antifa protesters clashed with police in Portland, Oregon, on Sunday.

They damaged an Immigration and Customs Enforcement Centre (ICE) and the Democrat party headquarters.

They held a banner reading, “We don’t want Biden—We want revenge.”

Activists are right to be sceptical of Biden’s promises to reform the US immigration system.

He is trying to bring immigration policy back to what it was when he was vice president under Barack Obama.

But Obama’s two terms as president meant horror and suffering for immigrants. They left families separated and children in federal detention centres.

For many, Obama will be known

Cops fire tear gas in Oregon

as the “deporter in chief” who expelled over three million people during his time in the White House.

Immigrant rights activist Erika Andiola said, “If the administration and the president return to practices from the Obama era, they’re definitely

going to see us in the streets.”

On the day of his inauguration Biden signed a number of executive orders to uproot some of the racist immigration policy brought in by Donald Trump.

They included stopping the ban on travel from Muslim majority

countries and reinstating the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme.

Biden plans to implement an eight year “path to citizenship” for immigrants already living in the US and wants to halt deportations for 100 days.

He has said he will create a task force to reunite families that were separated by the Trump administration.

But he has made no indication that he’ll reunite families separated while he was vice president.

Naureen Shah from the American Civil Liberties Union said, “Biden can’t just reverse President Donald Trump’s decisions, or label deportations under President Barack Obama a ‘big mistake.’

“He must repair the harm that was done when he was vice president, which left communities fractured and financially devastated.”

And Biden looks to be continuing to enforce tough controls at the US border with Mexico despite stating he will end construction of Trump’s wall.

This month thousands of migrants from central America trekked towards the Mexico border in an attempt to cross into the US.

One of those taking the journey told the press, “We can’t go back. Back home we’re dying of hunger.”

In response, the US ambassador to Guatemala said that “there is a renewed effort to keep the border safe during the Covid-19 emergency under Biden”.

“Any migrants who cross the US border irregularly will be returned immediately as a matter of national health security,” he added.

A federal judge blocked Biden’s proposed freeze on deportations for 14 days on Wednesday of last week.

Some of his immigration plans are already falling flat.

DVLA

Staff could strike over virus safety

WORKERS AT a dangerously overcrowded government workplace in Swansea have said they are ready to strike over safety.

Some 88 percent of people at the large Driver and Vehicle Licencing Agency (DVLA) office in Swansea said they're up for a strike, in a survey by their PCS union.

Around 2,000 people from Swansea and the surrounding area are currently made to come into work by DVLA bosses.

And many workers report unsafe conditions.

More than 500 staff there have caught coronavirus since September.

One DVLA worker told Socialist Worker, "Everyone is pretty angry.

"It's bewildering to see so many people packed into largely one building."

Demands

Some 400 workers attended an online meeting last week, where PCS officials said they would take demands to top DVLA bosses.

They were set to decide whether to push ahead with strikes at another mass meeting on Tuesday of this week.

The worker said, "A lot of people I spoke to who had been at the meeting were energised by it."

They added that many workers support using Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act to refuse to work in unsafe conditions.

School workers used Section 44 collectively last month to halt government plans to force schools to reopen.

Workers in Swansea should take urgent action to shut down the DVLA office and protect lives.

FIGURE IT OUT

535

workers at the Driver Vehicle and Licensing Agency in Swansea have caught Covid-19 since September

2,000

staff are currently being called to attend work there

400

workers joined a PCS union meeting last week and overwhelmingly voted to back strikes to defend safety

Palestinian activist faces jail over protests

by NICK CLARK

A LEADING Palestinian activist faces years in jail just for protesting against Israel's military occupation in his West Bank home.

Issa Amro told Socialist Worker how he is being punished for "pure non-violent resistance".

"The Israeli occupation denies Palestinian people the basic human rights of protesting against the occupation peacefully," he said.

Issa was convicted in an Israeli military court earlier this year on charges dating back as far as 2010. They include "crimes" such as participating in a march without a permit.

When he is sentenced, he could be jailed, hit with a heavy fine or banned from taking part in any more protests.

It's an attempt by Israel to make an example of one of Palestine's most prominent activists.

Issa lives in the Old City of Hebron, where some 700 Israeli settlers—and the soldiers who protect them—do their best to make life a misery for Palestinians.

They face Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and violence from settlers on a daily basis.

He has spent years organising peaceful protests demanding that once-bustling market streets—shut by Israeli forces—be reopened.

And he is known by Palestine solidarity campaigners around the world for speaking out and showing them the reality of the occupation when they visit.

"I am a Palestinian activist who does only pure non-violent resistance," he said. "I organise rallies, peaceful protests, sit-ins. I document human rights violations, I do a lot of tours including for diplomats and politicians.

"That means Israel hates me and exposes itself by using the military court."

Conviction

But he added that his conviction was about much more than trying to remove one activist. It was about "showing that there is no space for peaceful Palestinian resistance".

Under the military law that Israel imposes on the West Bank—which it invaded in 1967—Palestinians have to apply for permission for a political gathering of more than ten people.

"We as Palestinians are not allowed to protest peacefully according to Israeli military law," said Issa.

"The right of protest is violated. It means Palestinians don't have any tool for resisting the occupation."

Issa also explained how the use of military law exposed the "double



ISSA AMRO has been targeted by the Israeli authorities after holding protests

standards" that Israel applies to Palestinians and settlers.

While Palestinians are tried in military courts, settlers are subject to the same laws as residents inside Israel's borders—often not enforced in the West Bank.

Israeli human rights monitor Yesh Din recorded an increase in settler attacks on Palestinians in January—including attacks and riots against Palestinian villages.

Yet no settler has been charged. And while soldiers protect the settlers, they have stepped up raids on Palestinian homes.

"Under military law, we are guilty until we are proved innocent," said Issa.

"In the meantime, the Israeli settlers are under civilian law but there is no enforcement. They live with impunity."

Issa is set to be sentenced on Monday next week—by an Israeli officer who lives in a settlement. He is asking supporters to campaign for justice for him and all Palestinians.

"I want people to participate in our online campaign," he said.

"Contact their parliament and their foreign ministry. Talk to them to put pressure on Israel to stop going after Palestinians and human rights defenders."

"Give the Palestinians the right to protest against the occupation."

Sign the petition in solidarity with Issa at bit.ly/stand-with-issa

OBITUARY

Gerry Lecointe, 1964-2021

COMRADES WILL be saddened to hear of the sudden death of Gerry Lecointe, at the tragically young age of 56.

Gerry joined Holloway branch of the SWP in 1992, a year dominated by riots against police racism in Los Angeles and working class anger at Tory plans to close Britain's remaining coal mines.

The fascist BNP was growing in confidence. If there was going to be resistance, Gerry knew it would have to come from below.

He threw himself into local campaigns against the Nazis, while stressing the need to develop socialist organisation.

Though he had left school at 16, political activity gave Gerry the impetus to read and develop his theoretical understanding of Marxism.

As an activist in the party and the CWU union, this stress on the need for working people to engage with socialist theory remained constant.

He was part of rank and file organisation in Royal Mail in



Gerry Lecointe

north London that repeatedly humbled the bosses and pressured union leaders.

In the mid 2000s Gerry suffered a stroke that laid him low for the best part of a year.

He gradually recovered and was able to resume his job.

In my last conversation with him he was talking animatedly about the dangers of the far right and the prospects for the left in the US following the riot at the Capitol building.

A kind, gentle, modest man, Gerry will be remembered fondly by all who knew him.

If you want to mark his passing, raise a glass by all means but be sure to read some Lenin.

Yusuf Timms

DISTRIBUTION

DHL strikers won't give up on pay fight

DHL DELIVERY workers in Liverpool are continuing their strikes over pay and victimisation.

Unite union members were set to walk out from Tuesday this week and continue the action until Tuesday next week.

This follows a 48-hour walk out two weeks ago.

DHL bosses promised to make a "significantly improved offer over pay" and failed to do so.

Workers are set to earn just 2.5p above the minimum wage when it rises in April.

And warehouse operators report bullying by managers "on an almost constant basis".

Biscuits

The 120-strong workforce carries out the delivery contract for Burton Biscuits.

This includes the Wagon Wheel and Jammie Dodger brands, and AB World Foods.

Strikers previously held socially-distanced picketing in shifts to ensure a constant 24-hour presence.

Unite has said that industrial action will continue until DHL makes a significantly



PICKETING DELIVERIES at DHL

PICTURE: UNITE NORTH WEST

improved pay offer.

● Messages of support to the Unite union regional officer on 07720 703567

■ SECURITY STAFF at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading have launched new strikes.

The 20 security guards have been striking since mid-December over pay

against Kingdom Services Group Ltd.

Strikes are planned from this week until 7 March.

Unite union members are fighting for a £12 an hour pay rate for security officers. Bosses have refused to move from an offer of £9.30 an hour.

■ OVER 100 Unite union members at glassmaker

Pilkington's Cowley Hill and Greengate sites in Saint Helens in Merseyside are voting on strikes.

Bosses have not delivered a promised 2.5 percent pay rise, which was agreed in 2019 and set to take effect in March 2020.

The ballot closes on 11 February.

CONSTRUCTION

Scaffolders put up fight

SCAFFOLDERS launched a second round of strikes on Monday at the British Steel plant in Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire.

They are employed by contractor Brand Energy.

The Unite union members are in a pay dispute that began in 2019. Workers are demanding to be paid in line with the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (Naeci).

Currently they are paid £2 an hour less than Naeci rates. The workforce delivered a 100 percent yes vote for strikes.

Brand Energy is to set to lose the scaffolding contract on 15 February when it will transfer to rival firm Activo.

If the matter is not resolved, Unite will begin balloting for fresh industrial action with Activo, once the contract transfers.

Unite is investigating whether this breaches employment law.

BUSES

Battle at Go North West

THE UNITE union is balloting its 500 members at bus company Go North West in Manchester on whether to strike.

The ballot comes over the company's decision to fire and rehire its workforce.

Go North West, part of the Go Ahead Group, first threatened to fire and rehire its workforce last summer.

But negotiations failed, and the company is now forcing through its proposals.

This will see a 10 percent cut in driver numbers and workers working longer for no additional pay leaving them up to £2,500 a year worse off.

If workers vote in favour of action, strikes could begin by the end of February.

But the company is telling workers that if they agree to the new contract within seven days they will receive favourable routes and schedules.

Unite is investigating whether this breaches employment law.

AIRPORT WORKERS

Strikes win a new deal at British Airways cargo

WORKERS' ACTION has taken fire and rehire off the table at British Airways cargo.

Unite union members were voting on a deal this week.

Workers, mainly at Heathrow airport, struck for nine days over Christmas and the new year after a 98 percent vote in favour.

The deal sees an end to fire and rehire, no compulsory redundancies, improved pay protection and an increase in pay.

And members who did not sign the new contract and were dismissed will be

offered their jobs back.

Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett said, "This is a tremendous result. Huge credit must go to our members in BA Cargo.

"Fire and rehire is proving to be the present day go-to weapon of the worst type of employers.

"It is workers who will rebuild our industrial sectors post-Covid and they can only do so if their terms and conditions reflect the work they have undertaken over many years to build the profit of companies such as BA."

RETAIL

Wilko sick pay cuts scandal

HIGH STREET giant Wilko is disgracefully planning to cut sick pay for tens of thousands of its workers.

The company plans to stop sick pay after the first day of sickness from Monday this week.

Gary Carter, GMB national officer, said, "Employees will be pushed into poverty because they

won't be able to pay their bills if they are sick."

People Before Profit activists protested against the move in Chesterfield, Manchester and Clowne last week.

The company only narrowly avoided strikes in 2019 when 1,800 workers planned to walk out over new rotas.

ROUND-UP

Universal Credit protests

■ DISABLED People Against Cuts, the Homes For All campaign and People Before Profit are calling a national day of action this Saturday to fight plans to scrap the £20 uplift to Universal Credit.

The government plans to scrap the increase at the beginning of April.

Benefits should be increased, not cut.

■ OUTSOURCED cleaning workers, members of the UVW union, at La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' School in south London have begun a strike ballot.

Union members, all of whom are migrants from Latin America, are fighting plans by the school to cut over 800 hours of work.

The union says it is

"appalling" that contractor Ecoleen hadn't done any risk assessments of the school with cleaners until January.

Cleaner Juan Tamayo said, "We fear for our health and that of the vulnerable people we live with."

■ SECURITY GUARDS at Blackburn and Burnley hospitals are balloting for strikes in a fight over pay.

The Unison union members work for private firm Engie and earn well below NHS Agenda for Change pay rates.

The union is calling for NHS pay rates, without a change to shift patterns.

● Tweet protest messages to @EngieGroup and support to @NorthWestUNISON Sign the petition at bit.ly/NHS0102

SCHOOLS

Action in Hackney schools

TWO GROUPS of education workers in east London plan to hold three-day strikes from 10 February.

Walkouts by teaching support staff will hit Colvestone primary school and the Thomas Fairchild community school in Hackney.

The Unite union members are fighting plans that could put over 18 jobs at risk.

Some 32 drivers and

passenger assistants who take disabled children to and from school will also take action over health and safety.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said, "Hopefully the dovetailing of these two disputes will concentrate minds. Our members should not pay the price for the Covid-19 pandemic."

● Messages of support to shaun.noble@unitetheunion.org

HIGHER EDUCATION

New strikes over jobs set for Brighton university

A FIVE-DAY strike is set to hit Brighton university from Monday of next week.

UCU union members are taking action over plans to cut jobs in the IT department.

The walkout follows five days of strikes last December that won widespread support from students. UCU members are also holding a work to rule.

Strikers say that IT staff are needed more than ever now that many people are working from home. And they fear that the IT cuts could be a prelude to more widespread attacks on jobs.

Strikers planned a rally on Monday to mark the first day of the action.

● Send messages of support to m.abel@brighton.ac.uk. Donate to strikers at bit.ly/BackBrighton and tweet support to @BrightonUCU

■ SOCIALIST Worker is calling for a vote for candidates backed by the UCU Left in the union's elections this month.

Voting is underway for candidates to the UCU's national executive committee and other roles.

The UCU Left is standing candidates who will fight over five key issues—health and safety, workload, defending education, Black Lives Matter and opposing austerity.

Candidates for the NEC include Rhiannon Lockley, Dharminder Chuhan, Saira Weiner, Mark Abel, Marion Hersh, Lesley McGorrian and Bee Hughes. The UCU Left is also backing Paul Anderson for honorary treasurer.

● The UCU will hold an "interim Congress" on 13 and 16 February

GAS STRIKERS ARE RESOLUTE

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

BRITISH GAS workers completed their eleventh day of strikes on Monday.

Thousands of GMB union members are fighting plans by parent company Centrica to rehire workers on more hours, less pay and worse terms and conditions.

In Leeds over 50 workers picketed in small socially distanced groups outside British Gas headquarters.

Dawn, a striking engineer, said, "We've got to say no, we've got to fight back against this.

"We're looking for support. It's good to know that the people out there understand what we are fighting for," she added.

Message

Sending a message to Centrica chief executive Chris O'Shea, workers on the steps of St. George's Hall in Liverpool chanted, "No way O'Shea."

In Leicester workers also gathered on picket lines. Midlands and east coast GMB regional organiser Colin Todd told Socialist Worker, "The mood on the pickets is



BRITISH GAS workers protest in Leeds last Friday

PICTURE: LAURA MILES

good and more people are coming out every time.

"It was minus four degrees on one of the strike days last week but people still came out to picket." The strike has

got British Gas and Centrica worried. They have tried to downplay the situation and have suggested only a small proportion of the workforce is on strike. But

Dan, a GMB rep in South Yorkshire, says this isn't true. "94 percent of service engineers have rejected this contract," he said. "You can see by the picket lines that

more workers are out. It's definitely more than the 17 percent the company claims. It's the company using smoke and mirrors."

The GMB has announced

another three rounds of strikes—four days a week until 1 March.

And workers say they are ready to keep going.

British Gas engineer Scott wrote on Twitter, "I'm not going to lie, with the wife on maternity, and like many others, money will be tight but nothing will stop me striking."

Dawn added, "If British Gas gets away with this, lots of other companies are going to follow."

Pressure

It's important to put extra pressure on the bosses.

Every trade unionist should support the strikers and invite speakers to online union meetings.

Unions in different sections have recently signed deals with British Gas.

That should not have been done while engineers and others were fighting. Those sections need to find new ways to declare disputes.

If British Gas bosses don't back down, the strike should escalate to indefinite action. Collections and donations to a strike fund will be vital.

Send support to bit.ly/BGsolidarity

NHS

Heartlands hospital porters defy threat of the sack from bullying bosses

STRIKING PORTERS at Heartlands hospital in Birmingham are livid after being told they will be sacked this week—unless they sign new, worse contracts.

Around 140 workers, who are members of the Unison union, have been told that they must accept new, rotating shift patterns or face redundancy.

Many of the workers have built their lives—including caring for children and vulnerable relatives—around existing rotas.



Picketing porters

Striker Royston Bray has worked at the hospital for 23 years. He said, "There are going to be nine different start times.

"You'll be doing a couple of days of one shift and then have a day off. Then you'll be doing a couple of days on the next shift.

"So many porters have got commitments. Some are carers, and some take their kids to school or childminders. People just won't be able to cope."

Despite management threats, porters were set to walk out again from Monday to Wednesday

of this week. They have already taken 12 days of strikes.

Regional union official Claire Breeze told Socialist Worker, "Heartlands hospital porter members of Unison will not allow management to bully and intimidate them into accepting their draconian rota.

"Forcing porters to sign their new rota under duress or get sacked will strengthen their solidarity and resolve, not end their dispute," she said.

Heartlands is part of University Hospitals

Birmingham NHS Trust, which is headed up by former Labour home secretary Jacqui Smith.

The city's eight Labour MPs have written to Smith condemning the firing and rehiring.

Many in the local Labour movement have long asked why Smith has been able to step into such a high profile role.

Now, many more want to know why someone ramming through terrible attacks on low paid workers is allowed to remain a high profile member of the party.